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The Shifting Boundaries of Tolerance

A timely project

In the year 2011, the Department of Church History at Åbo Akademi University was awarded funding by the Academy of Finland for a research project entitled *The Shifting Boundaries of Tolerance: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Context of Nordic Church History, 1750–2000*. The project ran for four years and ended in July 2015.

The purpose of the project was to broaden and deepen the knowledge around religious diversity and the historical boundaries or limits of tolerance. It is a known fact that religious diversity, tolerance, and social exclusion are phenomena which have been present throughout the Church's 2,000-year long history. The Lutheran Church is no exception. Religious conflicts have been a recurring theme in Nordic church history and that is why the church historical research has often taken its starting point from a conflict perspective. With this project, we have chosen another approach. Rather than focusing on conflicts, we have tried to highlight the shifting borders of religious tolerance and thus include both those processes that expand tolerance and those processes where the space for tolerance has diminished. In this way, the project has come to be about issues that are highly relevant in our contemporary society, and, by examining them, our intention has been to contribute to the current public debate and growth of knowledge concerning those questions and issues much discussed in today's Europe.

Theoretical perspectives

The project has taken as its point of departure the concepts of internal and external inclusion and exclusion. These concepts have enabled a new way of analysing the relationships between a religious majority culture and religious minorities. With the concept of exclusion, we have considered a process through which one or more people cannot be accommodated in a religious group identity, and are therefore subjected to sanctions due to some kind of difference regarding their learning or way of life. With inclusion, we have considered the reverse process, i.e. that a group accepts religious difference and thus does not use any sanctions as regards the deviant group. Instead, a state of increased pluralism and tolerance emerges.

The two processes – inclusion and exclusion – have been aimed both at members of the primary group and at other groups that claim complicity. One can, for example, talk about internal exclusion in cases where the members of a group are excluded. Examples of this include the treatment of religious nonconformists by the church and political powers, or the revival movement's exclusion of dissident members. External exclusion, on the other hand, concerns the treatment of individuals and factions that are already, in one way or another, outsiders. For example, it may be about the church's conduct towards individuals professing other faiths. Similarly, inclusion may also be internal as well as external. Internal inclusion concerns, for instance, the successive acceptance of the Lutheran Church of greater diversity within its own domains, while external inclusion, for example, may concern the church's gradual acceptance of a resolution regarding its national religious monopoly. The project has analysed these processes in a Nordic church historical context. In addition to boundaries of tolerance in Finland and Sweden, the project has also aimed to make visible the inclusion and exclusion that has been in effect far outside Europe via the Christian mission.

The project consisted of five single studies. These studies have analysed the same phenomenon – changes of religious based boundaries

between various groups – but on different social levels. These levels have interacted empirically but have been separated in theory in order to be studied, conceptualised, and integrated into the overall interpretations and end result. The first level of inquiry concerned different societal discursive arenas. It is mainly the political and church historical discourses, which have been analysed in this regard. On the second level, the project scrutinised how exclusion and inclusion has been manifested at a local level and in the relationships between religious as well as non-religious groups. The third level dealt with the micro level where these processes have been analysed at the individual level. By combining a discursive perspective with an actor perspective, the project has strived to make analyses where the individuals' room for manoeuvre and concrete actions have been made transparent.

The common task for all the single studies was to analyse the internal and external inclusive processes that have led to increased tolerance, as well as the internal and external exclusive processes that have led to exclusion and religious alienation. The project proceeded from a socio-cultural perspective and understood the formation of religious identities as characterised or influenced by power relations, where tolerance boundaries form an important part. Religious group identities have – like other types of identities – been defined through the group's external relations. As a result, various groups have become apparent through their borders. However, these borders are often mere constructions and their importance may have varied, and what was once inside the borders may have changed. It is in this context that the two concepts of inclusion and exclusion, is to be understood. Tolerance boundaries have thus helped to create value based communities, which are often manifested through rituals, codes, and markers. This approach has in the project been combined with a historical theoretical perspective whereby the historic dimensions of the religious group identities have come into focus. It has been considered relevant to analyse the church historical portraying of the past on the basis of issues of identity processes as well as in the shaping of tolerance boundaries.

The period investigated

The project's period of investigation begins around 1750 when religious confessionalism began to be challenged in the Swedish Empire and certain religions and faith communities at the beginning of the 1780s were given some measure of freedom. Thereafter the project follows the successive deconfessionalisation that would finally result in citizenship being separated from church membership and religious affiliation being turned into a private matter. In Sweden, citizens were not guaranteed full freedom of religion until in 1951. The trend towards religious freedom was much more rapid in Finland, partly because of the religious diversity which characterised the country during the Czarist period.

During the period 1750–2000, the religious landscape of Finland and Sweden changed radically. It was transformed from having been influenced by confessionalism and a symbiotic relationship between the State and the Lutheran Church to a secular form of government and religious pluralism. However, even though the eighteenth century was permeated with the Lutheran Church's religious monopoly, a number of religious minority groups lived in the Swedish Empire. As early as in 1741, Anglicans and Reformed Protestants received expanded religious freedoms in the Swedish Empire. There were also Catholics and Jews. In Finland, there were already practicing Muslims resident during the first half of the nineteenth century. In addition, there were some groups of critical and reformist Lutherans who were members of the Church, but who did not observe the enforced doctrine or, who, for various reasons, criticised the church order. The enlargement of religious diversity became particularly apparent during the second half of the twentieth century.

The project's period of investigation has therefore lasted until the turn of the twenty-first century. This has given the researchers the opportunity to follow the evolution into our own time and to analyse the tolerance boundaries that characterise our modern society. Furthermore, this has also been a way to break new scientific ground

as a framework covering such an extended period of time is rare in church historical research of this kind. The project's starting point was that a framework covering a longer period of time provided favourable conditions for new observations relating to such slow tolerance processes that would not otherwise be visible. Thus, it has been possible to highlight the shifting boundaries of tolerance as a societal process. By combining studies from short and long term perspectives with concrete case studies and discursive analyses the project has tried to capture the exciting relationship between the periodically fixed, yet constantly moving, boundaries of tolerance.

The research team and the articles

The research team consisted of six people. When the project began, two of these members were professors, namely Ingvar Dahlbacka and Ulrika Wolf-Knuts. Two were adjunct professors (docents), namely Carola Nordbäck and André Swanström. The others were Kim Groop who was a university teacher, and Jakob Dahlbacka who was a doctoral student. During the four years that the project has lasted Ulrika Wolf-Knuts has been appointed chancellor of Åbo Akademi, Carola Nordbäck professor of Church History at Uppsala University, Kim Groop adjunct professor of Church History at Åbo Akademi, and Jakob Dahlbacka has obtained a doctorate in Church History at Åbo Akademi. Ingvar Dahlbacka served as the project's leader.

An important objective for this project was to investigate how the religious boundaries of tolerance have been drawn, have been maintained, and have changed in Nordic church history from 1750–2000. The findings have been reported in articles in various scientific journals and anthologies, but also through the monographs that have been written within the project.

The present anthology – *The Shifting Boundaries of Tolerance: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Religious Communities of Memory* – can be viewed as somewhat of an end report. It consists of five articles, where

the participants in the project, in their own ways, approach the shifting boundaries of tolerance.

Adopting a combination of theories from the Uses of History-perspective and from the Cultural Memory-perspective, Jakob Dahlbacka, in his article “Religious Uses of History as Inclusion and Exclusion”, tries to uncover some general characteristics of a religious use of history. He does this by analysing the literary legacy of Anders Svedberg (1832–1889) – the man who founded the first elementary school in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia, wrote actively in newspapers, and also represented the peasants in the Diet of Finland. Dahlbacka claims that religious uses of history, when used within religious communities of memory, can on the one hand serve as legitimacy and guarantee and on the other hand as a wake-up call and a driving force. Finally, and especially tangent to the theme of this anthology, Dahlbacka argues that the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are not only to be found *in* the history of the church but, what is more, the use of such history, *in itself*, has the capacity to work by inclusion and exclusion.

In the second article, Divine Law Enforcement and Mission Transculturality, Kim Groop scrutinises the Finnish Missionary Society and its creation of the first Church Law in the emerging Ovambo Lutheran Church – today the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia. The Finnish missionaries had ambitions to lay “proper” foundations for a future church of their own preference. In their work, they utilised the Finnish Church Law of 1869, a number of elements from the old Swedish Church Law from 1686, as well as their own discretion. Groop also examines issues of transculturality. He maintains that the Finnish undertaking in Africa was not simply characterised by the imposition of a new religion and new values, but rather that this work was a fitting example of cultural exchange and transfusion, resulting in a church with hybridised cultural traditions, religious practices, and memories.

In “Nicholas I and the Jewish Cantonist Soldiers in Finland” André Swanström examines issues of tolerance as regards the Jews in Finland during the time when Finland was a Grand Duchy, or autonomous part of the Russian Empire. Czar Nicholas I wanted to reform and modernise the lives of his Jewish subjects through education and military training. The reign of Nicholas I would have far reaching consequences for the Jewish communities in the Russian Empire. Swanström studies the psychological causes of Czar Nicholas’ policies with regard to the Jews. He aspires to grasp the psychohistorical ramifications of Nicholas’ troubled mind over the Jews in Finland.

The fourth article, “Lived Forgiveness in a Finland-Swedish Laestadian community”, is written by Ulrika Wolf-Knuts. In this study, Wolf-Knuts explores a religious movement – the Lutheran Laestadians – in which, a few years ago a case of paedophilia was exposed. She studies how forgiveness functions in praxis or what lived forgiveness looks like, or, more explicitly, how a member of a Laestadian community relates his experience of guilt, shame, and forgiveness. None of Wolf-Knuts informants were victims themselves, but they had known the paedophile and/or his family.

In the last article, “Försoning, erkännande och inklusion” (“Reconciliation, recognition and inclusion”), Carola Nordbäck deals with the Church of Sweden and its treatment of its colonial heritage and in particular the religious exclusion of the Sami people. Nordbäck examines how this church dealt with its responsibility for the historical repression that the Sami people were subjected to. In this article inclusion, exclusion, and the uses of history are combined in a new way. By relating to the reconciliation process, which is at present under way between the Church of Sweden and the Sami people, Nordbäck explores churchly reconciliation processes from a historical perspective. She studies the including aspects of reconciliation and sheds light on the societal exclusion which the Sami have faced and from which they are still suffering. This article is written in Swedish.

For a variety of reasons, many of the articles that have been written within the project have come to deal with issues pertaining to the uses of history as well as cultural memory. Therefore, we are delighted that the present anthology could be published in the publication series Religion and Memory. All five articles have been peer-reviewed.